

Sticks and Stones

DEFEATING
THE CULTURE OF
BULLYING AND
REDISCOVERING
THE POWER
OF CHARACTER
AND EMPATHY

Emily
Bazelon

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HARDCOVER AND eBOOK

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www.EmilyBazelon.com

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

BROUGHT TO YOU BY **EMILY BAZELON**, AUTHOR OF

STICKS AND STONES: Defeating the Culture of Bullying and Rediscovering the Power of Character and Empathy

MONIQUE: CHAPTERS 1 AND 4

Emily defines bullying as physical or verbal abuse that is repeated over time and involves a power imbalance—one kid, or group of kids, lording it over another. Do you agree with that definition? Is there anything about it you would change?

Research shows that boys are more likely to bully physically, and girls are more likely to use indirect means of hostility, like gossip and exclusion. Does that match your experience?

Emily makes a point of saying that at the heart of many “mean girl” stories is at least one boy who is actively participating. Does that match your experience?

At Woodrow Wilson School in Middletown, Conn., students in popular circles believed that social aggression was necessary to improve or maintain social status. Can school culture change the way ‘popularity’ is experienced?

Monique’s mother, Alycia, tried to do everything she could to help her daughter. But her effort to speak out publically backfired. What went wrong for Alycia? If you were in her position, what would you have done?

What role did social media play in Monique’s story?

What could Monique’s principal or assistant principal have done differently to stop the bullying?

What do you think of the role Juliebeth played for Monique? What stops more students for standing up for kids who have been bullied, and what would it take to change that?

What should the superintendent of the Middletown school district have done in response to Monique’s story?

One student stood up for Monique on Facebook: her boxing teammate, Juliebeth. What do you think moved Juliebeth to defend Monique?

One of the girls who ganged up on Monique, Aminah, said in a reflective moment, “I feel like Monique was just depressed, because she didn’t have a lot of friends. . . . I could see that she’d walk in the hallways with her head down.” Do you think Aminah felt empathy for Monique? Why didn’t she act on it?

When Alycia talks to Monique about going back to school, in a new place, she says, “Just make sure to try to be friends with everyone. But you know, if you ever come across this situation again, you’re going to defend yourself. You’re going to knock their damn head off.” Monique responds, “I don’t fight.” What do you think of this exchange?



JACOB: CHAPTERS 2 AND 5

What did you think of Jacob's decision to come out on MySpace, and of the post he wrote?

What did you think of Aaron's comment that Jacob should "Just act like normal people?"

The Mohawk school district denied official recognition to the Gay-Straight Alliance that Aric Barnett tried to start. Do you think that refusal played a role in Jacob's story?

Did you support Jacob's decision to sue the school district?

Did you agree with Mohawk's decision to give Aaron a long-term suspension?

What did you think of the outcome of Jacob's lawsuit?

FLANNERY: CHAPTERS 3 AND 6

The public outcry surrounding the suicide of Phoebe Prince gave rise to intense national news coverage and the narrative of the "bullycide." Emily argues that "bullycide" is a worrisome term. Why? Do you agree?

In what ways does the media's interest in bullying help address the problem? In what ways does it make the issue more difficult?

Emily reports that bystanders intervene when they see bullying only 20 percent of the time. What do you think are the key factors in a kid's decision to stand up to a bully?

When kids do intervene, they succeed in stopping bullying half the time. What are strategies for encouraging kids to "stand with victims," as the counselor Stan Davis puts it? What could the students at Phoebe's school have done to help her?

PREVENTION AND SOLUTIONS: CHAPTERS 7, 8, AND 9

When should a school investigate students' online postings?

What did you think of the court challenges brought of Kara Kowalski and J. Cohen to challenge their suspensions from school for online bullying that took place off campus? Did you side with the decision to uphold Kara's suspension, or the decision to strike down J's suspension?

To what degree do you think students have freedom of speech on social media? How much should judges defer to school officials when they discipline kids for what they write online?

How do you feel about the school culture in your community? How could it improve, and what would it take to make that happen?

What are three ways in which parents can help instill empathy in kids?

What about schools?

What about social media companies—do they have a role to play here?



And how about students: What can they do to prevent bullying, or help other kids through it?

What was your impression of Emily's visit to the Facebook offices? Do you think that the company's methods for dealing with cyber bullying are effective? What would you have Facebook do differently if you could?

Emily argues that social media companies like Facebook habituate kids (and adults) to give up their privacy? Do you think this is a problem?

What are three ways in which parents can help guide their kids in using cell phones and social network sites?

A group of seniors at the Mary Louis Academy in Queens came up with the idea of Delete Day to guide younger students in managing their online personas. Why did Delete Day succeed at that school? Is it an idea worth replicating?

You're in high school, reflecting back on middle school, what advice would you give younger students about how to deal with drama and social media?

Of the methods explored in the book, which do you think is most effective for dealing with bullying? Which would be the easiest to implement in your community? What are some of the core ideas that these methods have in common?

What do you think is the most important thing parents can do to help prevent bullying? What is the most important thing that schools can do?